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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Executive Committee
Fifth meeting
Beirut, 18-19 December 2018

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Implementation of recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its fourth meeting

Summary

The Executive Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held its fourth meeting at the United Nations House in Beirut, on 13 and 14 December 2017. It issued a set of recommendations to member States and to the ESCWA secretariat. The present document sets out the measures taken by the secretariat to implement the recommendations issued to it.

Executive Committee members are invited to take note of the implementation level and to comment on the steps needed to further operationalize the recommendations.

Recommendations made by the Executive Committee at its fourth meeting to the ESCWA secretariat and measures taken to implement them

Recommendation (a)

Submit at the thirtieth ESCWA session an integrated report on "Implementing the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda" setting out member States' efforts in implementing the Doha Declaration at the national level.

Implementation

At the thirtieth ESCWA session, the secretariat presented a comprehensive and detailed report on the measures taken to implement the Doha Declaration on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,[1] as a complement to a previous report presented to the Executive Committee at its third meeting.[2] The presentation focused on achievements by the ESCWA divisions in implementing the Doha Declaration. The secretariat said that the outputs of ministerial declarations were generally linked to the programme of work through an integrated approach adopted by specialized divisions.

Representatives of several member States reviewed efforts made under sections of the Declaration addressed to them. The representatives of Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, the State of Palestine and Yemen presented national efforts in that regard, notably incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into national development plans, developing institutional structures in relevant ministries to guide policies, adopting development plans and/or strategies in line with the 2030 Agenda, and continuing collaboration with ESCWA in building capacity and preparing national reports, especially voluntary national reviews to be submitted to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Recommendation (b)

Stress the importance of providing the documents set out in the Committee's agenda at least three weeks before the start of the meeting.

Implementation

ESCWA has made efforts to ensure that documents set out in intergovernmental meeting agendas are disseminated on time. Most documents for the thirtieth ESCWA session, held from 25 to 28 June 2018, were uploaded on the ESCWA website by 31 May 2018. Moreover, most documents for the nineteenth session of the Committee on Transport and Logistics, held from 26 to 28 November 2018, were uploaded by 6 November 2018, in line with this recommendation. Furthermore, most documents for the current meeting of the Executive Committee, held on 17 and 18 December 2018, were uploaded on 26 November 2018. In some cases, delays occur when documents include important international developments that took place shortly before ESCWA intergovernmental meetings.

Recommendation (c)

Highlight international developments in presentations given at Executive Committee meetings, especially those related to new resolutions on topics discussed by the General Assembly of the United Nations and its various organs.

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[1] E/ESCWA/30/10.

[2] E/ESCWA/2017/EC.3/3(Part II).

Implementation

At the thirtieth ESCWA session, presentations were made on key global developments regarding development and their impact on member States, including megatrends in the transport sector and their impact on the Arab region[3] and links between information and communications technology processes and sustainable development.[4]

The provisional agenda of the current meeting of the Executive Committee includes documents and presentations on developments in financing for development: progress in implementing the Addis Ababa Action Agenda in the Arab region; the Arab Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data: progress in implementation; supporting member States in the periodic review of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 years after their adoption; the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Five years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration; the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and its relevance to the Arab region; and climate change in the Arab region: relevant regional and international developments.

Recommendation (d)

Focus on ensuring that training sessions are more responsive to member States' needs, while taking into account country specificities and disparities between Arab countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Implementation

ESCWA has strived to ensure that its training sessions are more responsive to member States' needs, while taking into account country specificities. It undertook 79 advisory missions and capacity-building activities in 2018, as shown in the report on technical cooperation activities for 2018 presented to the current Executive Committee meeting.[5] It has also developed training tools on several issues, such as social justice, social protection and participation, which include reviews of various national experiences. Key tools are a training manual on incorporating the principles of social justice in preparing development plans and policies, a manual on building capacity for formulating participatory social protection policies, a manual on building capacity for assessing and measuring social and economic inequality in the Arab region,[6] and a manual on formulating and implementing equality-oriented policies in Arab countries.[7] A workshop, held in Cairo from 18 to 20 September 2018 with the participation of several specialists and policymakers concerned with disability, focused on promoting a common understanding of appropriate data for monitoring disability-related SDGs, and on preparing an Arab framework for disability indicators.

ESCWA training activities meet national needs in terms of climate change-related activities linked to SDG 13 on taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, and activities on disaster risk reduction related to SDG 11 on making cities and human developments inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. ESCWA is considering those issues in the context of water scarcity, land degradation, agricultural productivity, and extreme weather events in the region. Moreover, training sessions were held in July 2018 to build the capacity of national officials in the water and agriculture sectors and of experts, which were funded from extrabudgetary sources and the regular programme for technical cooperation. The training sessions included the eleventh regional training workshop on capacity development for climate change negotiations for

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[3] E/ESCWA/30/4.

[4] E/ESCWA/30/7.

[5] E/ESCWA/EC.5/2018/13.

[6] E/ESCWA/SDD/2017/Technical Paper.20.

[7] E/ESCWA/SDD/2017/Technical Paper.11.

the Arab countries, held in Cairo from 13 to 15 November 2018. Additional developments in that field are set out in a paper to be presented at the current meeting.

Approaches to evaluating institutional capacity have been adapted to the specificities of Iraq and Yemen. Around 25 Yemeni and 25 Iraqi civil servants were trained on those approaches at two workshops, the first on evaluating the capacity of Yemeni institutions in the fields of planning, budgeting and coordinating (Amman, 24-26 October 2018) and the second on evaluating institutional capacity in Al-Hamdaniya District (Nineveh Governorate, Iraq) in the field of implementing adopted plans and coordinating between various institutions and organizations (Beirut, 4-6 December 2018).

Around 30 civil servants were trained in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman and the State of Palestine in functional competencies at a joint Jordanian-Palestinian workshop on developing functional competency systems (Amman, 12-14 December 2017). A preparatory regional workshop is expected to be held to develop a common Arab framework for the competencies of senior cadres in the public sector from the perspective of the 2030 Agenda (Beirut, 11-13 December 2018).

The ESCWA secretariat organized three consecutive workshops on disseminating and applying the principles of good governance in Tunisian government departments, which benefited 50 civil servants (Tunis, 17-18 July 2018; 19-20 July 2018; and 23-24 July 2018). Moreover, a booklet was published on disseminating the principles of good governance in the Tunisian public sector, focusing on mechanisms to combat corruption and promote transparency in the country's constitutional and legal frameworks, which was distributed to stakeholders in Tunisia.

Regarding trade policies, the ESCWA secretariat organized two regional training sessions: the first on the impact of joining the Arab Customs Union on the Palestinian economy and mechanisms to develop customs procedures (Amman, 6 September 2018); and the second on monitoring and evaluating a trade integration toolkit (Beirut, 10-11 July 2018). Concerning financing for development, a national workshop was held to provide a new perspective on fiscal and monetary policy in Bahrain (Manama, 23-26 April 2018).

Recommendation (e)

Continue coordinating between ESCWA, the League of Arab States and other regional and international organizations on implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Implementation

ESCWA and the League of Arab States have forged a strategic partnership in all areas of their joint work, especially issues related to following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. The following are key joint efforts between the two organizations:

- Organizing and holding the annual Arab Forum on Sustainable Development, in collaboration with the ESCWA secretariat, the League's secretariat and the Regional Coordination Mechanism that comprises all United Nations organizations and bodies working in the Arab region;

- Preparing the periodic Situation Report on International Migration, which is related to the implementation of the SDGs on international migration, by the Working Group on International Migration in the Arab Region that is chaired by ESCWA, the League's secretariat and the International Organization for Migration;

- Organizing the Arab Regional Conference on Population and Development: Five Years after the 2013 Cairo Declaration, in collaboration with the League's secretariat and the United Nations Population Fund, which was held in Beirut from 30 October to 1 November 2018 with wide stakeholder participation;

- Continuing the partnership to support the development of an Arab strategy on poverty reduction following the publication of the first edition of the Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report, which was a collaborative effort between ESCWA, the League's secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative in September 2017 on the sidelines of the General Assembly;

- Coordinating to hold an expert group meeting on pursuing improved shared water resources management within the framework of global and regional agreements (Beirut, 8-9 December 2018). Topics of discussion include countries' responses to questionnaires on target 5 of SDG 6 on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Recommendation (f)

Prepare a study on significant trends in the transport sector and their impact on the Arab region, such as the One Belt One Road Initiative, northern navigation, and new technologies including artificial intelligence.

Implementation

The ESCWA secretariat prepared a concept note entitled "Megatrends in the transport sector and their impact on the Arab region",[8] which was presented at the thirtieth ESCWA session as part of the ESCWA project to develop a vision on multimodal transport in the Arab region. The secretariat also prepared a background paper entitled "The technological revolution and its impact on the future of the transport sector in the Arab region", which was presented to the Committee on Transport and Logistics at its nineteenth session (Beirut, 26-28 November 2018).

Recommendation (g)

Present the project on a multimodal transport system in the Arab region to specialized Arab ministerial councils to ensure high-level political support for the project, and urge regional and international financing institutions to mobilize resources for its implementation.

Implementation

The ESCWA secretariat presented a project on formulating a common strategic vision for developing a multimodal transport system in the Arab region[9] at the Regional Consultation Meeting on Corridors for Vital Connectivity in the Arab Region, held in Beirut on 23 April 2018 with the support of the Islamic Development Bank. Participants included representatives of the World Bank, the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab Maghreb Union, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Africa, and several regional associations involved in transport and trade. The project was also presented to the World Bank at a meeting held at its headquarters in Beirut on 11 August 2018; and at a forum on determining the impact of the Silk Road on Arab countries from an integrated perspective, held in Alexandria, Egypt, on 17 and 18 September 2018 in collaboration with the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport and the secretariat of the League of Arab States. The project was also presented to the German Agency for International Cooperation on 10 September 2018.

Recommendation (h)

Publish the Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report periodically; continue working with Arab countries and organizations and support regional efforts to develop programmes to end multidimensional poverty; and

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[8] E/ESCWA/30/4.

[9] https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/events/files/rwy_lskw_lttwyr_nzm_nql_mtdd_lnmt_fy_lmntq_lrby_0.pdf (in Arabic).

provide support to member States, upon request, in measuring and reducing multidimensional poverty by formulating and implementing related policies and plans and by building individual and institutional capacity.

Implementation

As part of efforts to publish the second edition of the Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report, the ESCWA secretariat established an advisory committee to review the approach to measuring multidimensional poverty to make it more consistent with the situation in Arab countries. Following requests to the secretariat from several countries, ESCWA is currently preparing to provide technical support to strengthen national efforts on poverty reduction.

Recommendation (i)

Conduct research at the national level to calculate the economic cost of violence against women, upon countries' request and in line with the realities, specificities and needs of each society; and encourage policymakers to take appropriate measures to intensify efforts towards preventing and protecting women from violence, and strengthening the exchange of successful experiences between countries that have calculated the economic cost of violence against women and the countries aiming to do so.

Implementation

After ESCWA finished designing the first Arab model to calculate the economic cost of violence against women, regional consultations were held with national women's machineries and statistical apparatuses to introduce them to the model, stress the importance of estimating the cost of violence against women, and showcase how to use the findings of the project to make proposals to end violence against women.

Several countries, including Iraq, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, submitted requests for ESCWA technical support in preparing studies to estimate the economic cost of violence against women. Efforts included holding consultations with all national stakeholders, preparing preliminary studies on the types of violence against women and on available administrative and statistical data, developing workplans to calculate the cost in accordance with country specificities, and providing technical guidance on designing national surveys on the issue. ESCWA, in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund, is currently preparing the first Arab guide on measuring the cost of violence against women, which documents Arab experiences in that area.

Recommendation (j)

Prepare a study on the economic and social costs in member States facing challenges related to the Committee's mandate, upon countries' request, with special focus on supporting rebuilding and recovery programmes.

Implementation

ESCWA is undertaking several research activities, including some on assessing the impact of conflict on human capital by analysing household surveys in Iraq and Yemen. The findings of those analyses are expected to be published in early 2019. ESCWA is also preparing a study on monitoring the SDGs in conflict-affected Arab countries: analysing partial data from household surveys, which will also be published in early 2019.

Recommendation (k)

Stress the importance of linking the ESCWA Statistical Committee with the other ESCWA subsidiary bodies to enhance communication between statistical apparatuses and other development sectors; and consider the possibility of holding joint sessions with other committees to discuss various statistical challenges.

Implementation

The ESCWA secretariat is striving to link the work of the ESCWA Statistical Committee with that of other ESCWA subsidiary bodies. It has developed an intergovernmental subcommittee under the Committee on Women on gender and the SDGs, comprising representatives of national women's machineries and national statistical offices. Two workshops were held in 2018 to build the capacity of subcommittee members and support national efforts to prepare voluntary national reviews on the 2030 Agenda, with a special focus on incorporating SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

The ESCWA secretariat is currently working on holding a session of the Statistical Committee in late 2019 alongside that of another ESCWA subsidiary body, so as to discuss a common issue resulting in recommendations that strengthen links between statistics and other development sectors. The Chair of the Statistical Committee will be invited to represent the Committee at other subsidiary body sessions, depending on the issues being discussed, so as to enhance communication between committees.

Recommendation (l)

Continue working on developing frameworks for technical cooperation activities with interested countries, and draw upon resolutions and reports by the General Assembly and its various organs when providing such technical support.

Implementation

In 2018, ESCWA completed its work on a technical cooperation framework with Iraq. In collaboration with the Governments of Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, two technical cooperation workshops were held to develop technical cooperation frameworks for the two countries (Amman, 13 May 2018; and Damascus, 3 June 2018). Work has begun on technical cooperation frameworks for Kuwait, the State of Palestine and Yemen, and on reviewing the current technical cooperation framework with the Sudan.